



The South India CHURCHMAN

The Magazine of the Church of South India

December 1998

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**THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH
DECEMBER 1998**

There is only one way of being faithful to the Incarnation and that is to become an embodied testimony to the living God. Perhaps the core of the apologetic task in every age is to be created in lives rather than in arguments (**Gabriel Marcel**).

The birth of Christ, for those who believe in Him, means that from this moment on, the indescribable mystery which we call God can only be found in someone entirely like you and me. What the Christian is really trying to say at Christmas is, 'I believe in Man' (**H.J.Richards**).

In his life Christ is an example,
Showing us how to live;
In his death he is a sacrifice
satisfying for our sins;
In his resurrection, conqueror;
In his ascension, a king;
In his intercession, a high priest!
(**Martin Luther**).

The incarnation broke the wall between time and eternity, temple and market, church and shop, sacred and secular. The Incarnation allows no division of the Gospel into personal and social, permits no surrender of the group to the devil in order to rescue one member of it from him, lets no public injustice escape the Gospel's judgment while the Gospel tends some private man's grief. The God who assumed flesh sought the redemption of the whole man in all his circumstances and conditions. Forgetting this, the Church ceases to be the Church of the Incarnate Christ.

(**K.Haselden**)

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**THE SOUTH INDIA
CHURCHMAN**

The Magazine of the Church of South India

DECEMBER 1998

Editor

Rev. C. V. Theodore

C.S.I. Centre

5, Whites Road

Royapettah

Chennai - 600 014

Phone : 852 1566 / 858 9561

Fax : 91-44-852-3528

E-Mail: <csisnd@md3.vsnl.net.in>

Business Manager

Rev. G. Dyvasirvadham

General Secretary - CSI

C.S.I. Centre

5, Whites Road

Royapettah

Chennai - 600 014

Phone 852 1566

Hon. Agent in U.K.

Rev. R.J. Sleigh

162, Sweetbrier lane

Heavitree, Exeter, Devon EX1 3DG, U.K.

Tel. No. (01392) 257692

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CHRISTMAS AND CREATIVITY

A couple of weeks ago I was invited to Gummidipundi a suburb 50 kms. north of Madras bordering Andhra Pradesh to give the Lord's message at the ecumenical carol service in which the Catholic Church and the other Protestant Churches in that area participated. Each congregation was given time to sing two songs relating to Christmas theme and I was asked to head a panel of judges to select the first two places. Though the format was that of a competition of which the organisers themselves were very apologetic, it was rather a time for sharing of talents and skills and rejoicing. It was a typical rural congregation with participants coming from different villages in that area. When I saw those glowing faces from the villages my heart sank. I thought it was going to be yet another gruelling session with those village folks treating us to a boring session of the 'same old stuff' half-rehearsed and served indifferently. It did not take long for me to realize how mistaken I was.

What struck me most was the super-abundance of creativity that was there in our people. Most of the carols that were sung were original compositions highlighting pertinent social issues and what the birth of Christ meant in this context. Secondly these songs were set to indigenous folk tunes exuding the flavour of the soil which was refreshing and exhilarating. It was like a whiff of fresh air blowing across an arid land.

Usually on an occasion like this we satisfy ourselves with singing the same old carols, hearing the same old tunes and seeing the same old pageants. They have their own charm and spell and it is always nice to listen to the good old familiar songs and carols. Tradition certainly has a place in our lives. But we also have a duty to make our contribution to the collective memory of our religious experience, a contribution that is authentic and genuine, stamped with the creativity and aspirations of our own generation. Each generation has to relive the Christmas experience and rejoice and produce its own *In Excelsis Deo*.

The carols had some shortcomings though. The content of the songs were more issue based

A VIEW FROM THE PEW

than theologically oriented. Incarnation is basically an extraordinary event when time was shot through with eternity and the divine intermingled with the human. As someone rightly said Gospel is not good advice but good news. Some of our traditional carols that warm the cockles of our hearts are quintessence of the theology of incarnation. For instance the two well-known familiar carols "O come, all ye faithful," and 'Hark! the herald angels sing' give us the theology of incarnation condensed in verse as could be seen in:

*"God of God, Light of light,
Lo! He abhors not the Virgin's
womb;*

*Very God, Begotten not
created"*

&

*Christ by highest Heav'n
adored*

*Christ the Everlasting Lord
Late in time behold Him come
Offspring of the Virgin's womb
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the Incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with men to
dwell*

Jesus, our Emmanuel

Our modern compositions need to keep a balance between theology of incarnation and its relevance to our daily life today. On the whole the ecumenical carol service I attended that day was enjoyable for more than one reason. The hope it held out in terms of the super-abundance of creativity among us and the unity it fosters among us His children who are unfortunately separated on grounds of tradition and historical compulsions.

Our church has to encourage its people to produce their own *In Excelsis Deo* with the theology of incarnation and their joy expressed in their own idiom and in terminology with a ring of authenticity about it a sufficient expression of their creativity and genuine religious experience of this unique event. As for me I returned that day a much more chastened man full of hope and joy humming to myself 'Joy to the World, The Lord is Come'! May this Joy be yours too this Christmas Season and continue in the years to come.

The Moderator, the Deputy Moderator, the General Secretary, the Hon. Treasurer of the CSI Synod, the Editor and the Staff of the Synod Secretariat wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

-Ed.

Letter to the Editor

Sir,

Greetings in the precious name of our Lord. I write this brief note in connection with the Great Jubilee of the Church that falls in the year 2000 AD.

I am sure that the Synod Executive Committee (under your leadership) is organising in a big way to celebrate this unique event which happens only once in hundred years.

May I request you in this context to take steps to stop by 2000 AD. The practice of collecting capitation fee for appointments and admissions in the CSI Educational Institutions, which has become a root cause of many evils in the Church and one of the demoralising forces in the society. Moreover our claim that the Church is guided by the unique gospel of love and reconciliation of Jesus Christ appears meaningless in the sight of others and our tall talks of justice and peace mean nothing to outsiders. So apart from the scandal this money brings/ it causes serious other humiliating consequences to the Church in

the Indian context.

I am very well aware of the financial compulsions of our Educational Institutions such as proper accommodation, equipments and maintenance. I also know what other organisations and private managements do to meet such requirements. The Church is meeting even greater needs incollect funds from Bishops, Pastors, Doctors and other employees at the time of their appointments even though some of them get better emoluments than that of teachers and lecturers. Our Seminarians also are not asked to pay money for their selection to Theological studies and most of them get free theological education with good scholarships.

So my proposals are:

- 1) that the CSI should take the bold step of stopping this unhealthy practice of collecting capitation fee from teachers and students by the year 2000 AD
- 2) that this problem of finding funds for the needs of the education ministry of the church be discussed both in diocesan level and in Synod level to find

internal and external resources. If we provide proper awareness to our people to contribute towards this ministry a good sum of money can be collected regularly from church people including those employed in the various ministries of the church. I hope that we may get matching support from our related mission agencies to meet this financial need not only for our immediate requirements but also to handle this problem on a long term basis.

I am not making copies of this letter to our Bishops. I hope they will reflect on the issue. I very much hope that the Executive Committee of the Synod will take this matter seriously and will do something to remove this scandal other areas of its ministry such as pastoral, healing, caring etc., and for that it does not collect funds from Bishops, scandal from the church as part of Jubilee Commitment of going back to the original vision of our pioneer missionaries. (Lev. 25:8-11).

Bishop I.Jesudasan (Retd.)

DR. COLLISON AWARD

To honour the late Rev. Dr. J. G.F. Collison, Professor of New Testament at the United Theological College, Bangalore and to encourage fresh theological research, a group of Indian and western friends and colleagues of his have established up to four annual awards of at least Rs. 3,000/- each for outstanding published research in any of the theological fields, with special consideration being given to publication in Dr. Collison's field. Members of the faculties of any of the theological colleges affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College are eligible for an award. Priority will be given to publications based on research done after completing post-graduate programmes. Special consideration will be given for writing that is contextually responsive and engages at some point in interdisciplinary reflection.

The initial awards will be for research published in 1997 and 1998. The published articles or book to be considered for the award should be submitted, together with bio-data and proof of publication by 31st march 1999. Submissions (or Enquiries) should be sent to the group coordinator,

Dr. Frederick S. Downs, 3, Osborn Snow Drive, South Dennis, MA 02660, USA. Fax 508-385-4377.

E-mail fmdowns@capecod.net

REJECTION MOTIF IN THE CHRISTMAS STORY

O.V. Jathanna*

"And she ... laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn". (Luke 2:7)

"He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him". (John 1:11)

These verses form a part of the Christmas story - God's own story. It is the story of God's coming to his own world in a new and decisive way. As God's own story, it may sound strange in our ears; for the Evangelists do not present it as a "success" story. They depict it rather as the story of a rejected One. In a world which is becoming increasingly success oriented, what does this story have to say to us? Does it indicate that our criterion for judging what is success and failure in matters of ultimate value is too facile, and that our perspective for understanding God's ways and God's acts is too inadequate?

In fact, rejection is an important motif in the Bible. It reaches a climax in the Christ event, as Jesus himself made it clear in his *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* (Mt. 21:33-46). The Old Testament also bears witness to this truth: Moses was a person who was earlier rejected as a liberator and he had to become a refugee in a foreign land. In the case of the Servant of the Lord found in the Book of Prophet Isaiah, this truth becomes even clearer. There we read about the Servant of the Lord: "He was despised and rejected by others

..." (Is. 53:3). Further, the Psalmist says: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone ..." (Ps. 119:22). Later both these motifs - that of the Servant of the Lord and of the stone acquired Messianic significance and they appear several times in the New Testament.

The manger of the crib has become part and parcel of Christmas decoration. It is meant to add colour to the celebration. The Lukan text, however, makes it amply clear that the baby Jesus was laid in the manger not for any fanciful reasons. He was laid there for the simple reason that there was no place for them in the inn. John speaks of the coming of the *Logos*, i.e., the Eternal Word of God, to this world, through whom the entire universe came into being. He was the life and light of the universe and was full of truth and grace. But when he came, he was not accepted. What could be the reasons for this? We can think of at least three probable reasons:

1) The Human Selfishness:

This is basically the philosophy of I and mine. It is enough if I have everything that I and my family need. I am not my brother's keeper. The needs of others are not my concern. The inn is occupied by such people. It is already full. They are safe inside. Their needs are met. They are not worried about others.

2) Human value systems and

structures:

These are made by the privileged, and serve the interests of the privileged. They often appear to be just, without truly being so. For example, the adage, "First come, first served", sounds quite good. But the question is, whether all have the needed facilities to come first. For example, those who have to work long hours, the sick, the aged, those who are handicapped in different ways cannot compete with others, in order to qualify, if the "first come, first served" principle is applied. This principle can be justified only if all have the same facilities and privileges. In the case of Mary, she was pregnant and the time to give birth to her baby was fast approaching. Moreover, they had to travel rather a long distance from Galilee to Bethlehem. In a society where competition is the criterion, there is no place for persons like Mary; nor for her child.

3) The Spiritual blindness:

This is also another important theme of the Bible. We are not able to see God and the ways of God. Our own ambitions, our own ideologies, our own set goals cloud our vision of God. More often than not, we want to understand God and God's ways within the horizon of our own understanding, within our own plans for the future. If God's ways suit our convenience, then all right. If not, we quietly reject

* He teaches theology at the United Theological College, Bangalore

God and God's ways in our hearts. Then there is no place for God in our lives. The star that points to the birth of the Saviour has appeared. A multitude of the heavenly host has sung the praise of God. The prophetic dreams are being fulfilled. All these to no avail. The interest lies elsewhere. Eyes do not see the things of God, and ears do not hear the voice of God, as they are not fixed on, and attuned to God. This is spiritual blindness.

This was true not only at the birth of the Saviour. It was also true throughout his life. This truth was already indicated by the old sage Simeon, when he said about Jesus that the child, as a sign, would be rejected or contradicted ('*antilegein*' Lk. 2:34). That means, people would set themselves in opposition to it.

Jesus himself said: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head". (Lk. 9:58). The rejection reaches its peak in the handing over of Jesus to the Roman authorities by the leaders and in the shouting of the crowd: "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us! ... Crucify, crucify him". (Lk. 23:18, 21).

True, every group of people had their own reasons for rejecting Jesus Christ, when he came into the world:

For the Pharisees, what was important was their interpretation of the law - what their forebears and they had carefully woven together as a sure way to be acceptable in the sight of God. Their priority was not love,

compassion and the purity of heart.

For the Saducees, what really mattered was power, business, money and aristocratic life-style. Their sole interest was to safeguard their inherited and acquired privileges. The way of Jesus was too rustic and even subversive and, therefore, too dangerous for their vested interests.

For the Essenes, Jesus was too liberal in his outlook and in his way of life. He is committed to the transformation of the whole world and not just for the salvation of a tiny elitist religious minority, who have written the world off as irredeemable.

For the Zealots, Jesus did not have a nationalistic political agenda to make the Jews and

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Jews alone the ruling class, and to subjugate all others by the power of the sword. Jesus' way, on the other hand, was the way of inclusivistic, self-giving love the way of being one human family under the loving reign of one God, participating in the very life of God.

For the common people, Jesus was too demanding in terms of religious commitment, ethical values and holiness. They wanted an easy-going life. They were looking for a non-demanding, sensational demagogue.

In every generation people reject the Messiah for different reasons. The manner of their rejection too is different. But what is common is that it is the rejection of the ways of God, in deference to the petty interests of theirs. Bowie, a New Testament scholar, says that the words, "because there was no room for them in the inn" is "an eternal parable of the human soul". Today, as we celebrate the birth of Christ - Christmas - are we in tune with the ways of God? Are we with the shepherds, with the old Simeon, with the widowed Anna and with the Magi, who responded to God's initiative positively? Or, are we aligned ourselves with the despot King Herod, the business-minded Sadducees, the legalistic Pharisees, and the narrow-minded exclusivistic Zealots in rejecting the one who has come to save us from sin and death? Our value system, our horizon of understanding, our perspective, our life-style, our plans and projects are all called into question by the babe of Bethlehem. For,

in his light, we see our darkness and shadows; in the light of his perfection we see our shortcomings; and in the light of his vision for the future, which is called the Kingdom of God, we see the narrowness and frailty of our plans and dreams. What God intends for his entire creation is something great, even beyond our imagination. Paul put it succinctly, when he said: "Things beyond our seeing, things beyond our hearing, things beyond our imagining, all prepared by God for those who love him ..." (1 Cor. 2:9). Peter made it clear to the Israelites that in rejecting Jesus they had "rejected the Holy and Righteous One ... and ... killed the Author of Life ..." (Acts 3:14-15). So long as we are attuned to the ways of this world and imbibe its value-systems uncritically, we fail to understand God and his ways. God's wisdom then appears to us to be foolishness; his strength, weakness. We shall then be busy in collecting the pebbles, and miss the pearl of great value, i.e., the Kingdom of God.

The Good News however is that the rejected One does not reject those who reject him. He calls us with outstretched arms for repentance, transformation and new life. He offers us a new horizon of understanding, a new vision, a new heart and a new power. That will enable us to recognise in the Babe in the manger a new hope for the world, and a new strength to work for the kingdom of peace, love and joy that Jesus Christ has inaugurated on the earth. Jesus' call reaches us today as he stands in solidarity with all the uprooted, downtrodden, underprivileged,

hapless masses and individuals as the Rejected. His call also comes to us in the midst of meaninglessness, loneliness, weariness and directionlessness as we are caught up in the web of today's ruthless competitive society, which knows not whither it is moving.

The rejection motif in the Christmas story, thus points to a deep truth; we cannot understand with an unregenerated mind and heart. A constant *metanoia* repentance is needed for knowing the ways of God and for walking in God's path. The power of God's self giving love is able to transform us and the world. Those who experience this love become the channels of this love, all accepting and all transforming love. Let God's love as manifested in the first Christmas in the midst of hostility and rejection triumph. Let it bind us all together in the service of this new life. Glory be to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth among all. Let it bind us all together in the service of this new life. Glory be to God in highest heaven and peace on earth among all people. For God has manifested his abiding loving kindness and invincible goodwill in a decisive way on the first Christmas day.

In the recently concluded Synod of the Church of North India, the Rt. Rev. Vinod Peter, Bishop in Nagpur was elected Moderator of the CNI.

The Church of South India and the South India Churchman heartily congratulate him on his election and pray for God's richest blessings on him.



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	[B. Under Asia Theological Association (ATA)]	
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Snippets from the WCC Jubilee Assembly held at Harare, December 1998

WCC has eight new members.

The Assembly's decision raises to 339 the number of the council's full and associate member churches, up from 332. (One of the eight churches admitted to full membership had previously been an associate member church.)

WCC calls for cancellation of debts

The World Council of Churches intends to propose the cancellation of debts owed by the world's poorest nations, but not without holding a dialogue with borrowers and lenders, the WCC General Secretary said at a press conference.

WCC - A polygamist husband!

The WCC was likened to a polygamist husband who

Catholics joining WCC not out of the question, says Fr. Thomas Stransky.

Women, youth want bigger role in WCC

after failing to come to terms with his wife and children, builds a new homestead and takes on a new family instead. The image came from evangelicals following the council's proposal to create a forum allowing for increased participation of non-member churches and ecumenical organisations.

"After a marriage of 50 years (the husband) fails to get consensus in his homestead and he goes for a soft option," said Nima Joyce an assembly delegate from the Anglican Church of the province of Uganda.

WCC sets up commission with Orthodox Churches

The Assembly set up a special commission in a bid to resolve the issue of the participation of Orthodox Churches in the Organisation.

However only hours after the Assembly voted to set up the commission, the Russian Orthodox Church delegation at the Assembly announced that it was suspending its participation in the WCC's Central Committee while the 'special commission on Orthodox participation in the WCC' conducted its deliberations.

Women's ordination, inclusive language in reference to God and discussion of homosexuality by WCC protestant members as well as westernised decision making processes which the Orthodox feel marginalise them within the ecumenical movement.

Central Committee Nominations

A look at the Statistics among Non-Orthodox Churches. Nominations from the main geographical areas worked out as:

Africa, 24 seats:	<i>17 male, 7 female, 3 youth</i>
Asia 24 seats:	<i>14 male, 10 female, 4 youth</i>
Caribbean 4 seats:	<i>3 male, 1 female, 0 youth</i>
Europe 27 seats:	<i>16 male, 11 female, 5 youth</i>
Latin America 6 seats:	<i>3 male, 3 female, 1 youth</i>
North America 23 seats:	<i>14 male, 9 female, 4 youth</i>
Pacific: 5 seats:	<i>2 male, 3 female, 0 youth</i>

CONGRATULATIONS!

The South India Churchman congratulates
Rev.G.Dyvasirvadam,
General Secretary,
Church of South India
on his election to the 150 member Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, at its Jubilee Assembly at Harare. This committee will run the WCC for the next 7 years until 2005 when the next Assembly meets.

CHRISTMAS GIFT

To you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Messiah the Lord (Luke 2 :11)

The birth of Jesus Christ is a unique event in world history. It has become customary to treat it as a mere birthday celebration. Once you go into the depth of Christ's birth, you will learn the meaning of it. Christmas may be called the Great Meet of God with Man, the Great Gift that man ever received, the Gift of Grace.

Traditionally gifts and greetings are associated with Christmas. It is part of the festival tradition. While we exchange material gifts, we should not fail to remember the spiritual gifts imparted through Christmas. On a Christmas Eve, a Washington Radio Station asked the comments of Ambassadors on Christmas. One ambassador said that it should be a season of peace to the world. The second ambassador said, it should be a message of justice for all people. The third one said, it should be a time of sharing the resources of the world. Finally, the last ambassador said, 'I would like a box of crystalised fruits'. For nominal christians, Christmas is as it was to the last Ambassador.

Let us point out some of the spiritual gifts Christ brought through His birth.

Gift of Hope : (Luke 1:78, 79)

Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit called Jesus as the dawn from on high and the light to those sitting in darkness. Since the fall of Israel, a hopelessness prevailed in Jerusalem. Many prayerfully waited for the redemption of Israel. Christ came as the hope for the hopeless. Like the sun breaks the daylight, the sun of righteousness dawned on the hopeless humanity

giving them Hope.

For the people living in darkness, He is the Hope. Birth of Christ is not a finished event. Christ continues to be born wherever there is tears, sorrow, poverty, suffering and oppression. The manger symbolizes this. The hope of Christmas is not an utopian hope. It is a hope that operates in day-today-life.

Gift of Way : (Matthew 2:9)

When they had heard, they set out and there ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was born. The star guided the wisemen to 'the way' and disappeared. Jesus Christ is the way (John 14:6). For years people have been searching the way. The way is born in Christ's birth. Because Christ is born as the way to humanity, Christmas may be called the festival of the way. Those who lost direction in life should find it in Christ. We read reports of those who lost their way in the newspapers every day.

Christ's way is that of holiness, truth, life, righteousness and peace, which are manifested in His life and work. One who opts to walk in this way will not stumble or slip. The wisemen took a slight deviation from the way of the star to the palace of Herod which caused the death of many innocent children. The world offers many ways like the multiple choice questions given to students. But God places only one way before us. This is the way of Christ.

Gift of Joy : (Luke 2:10)

Do not afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. Joy is a divine gift that springs from the heart. Joy cannot be compared to

consumer satisfaction. Biblically speaking Joy is the outcome of the meeting of two holy hearts. In the garden of Eden, the first couples walking with the Lord at the time of evening breeze experienced this joy. The moment their heart leaned to Satan, the joy turned to sorrow.

Christmas restores the lost joy back to humanity. The news about the birth of Christ in her womb made Mary to sing, 'My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour' (Luke 1:47). This joy filled the hearts of Mary, the mother of Jesus and Elizabeth, the mother of John, when they met each other. The only way given to humanity to get the lost joy is Christ. Therefore, celebrate Christmas with divine joy flowing from our hearts.

Gift of Salvation: (Luke 2:11)

To you in the city of David is born a Saviour, who is the Messiah. Man very much needed a Saviour to save him from his fallen nature. The one born of this world cannot save others because he too has the same sinful nature. Therefore, God sent His son from above to be the Saviour of the world. The salvation Christ brought in His birth is not limited to christians alone. Christmas transcends all barriers of nation, region, race, caste, class etc. It is a universal message. Christmas calls all to celebrate the salvation.

Christmas being the festival of salvation, cautions us to discard everything that does not save us. A great message of salvation act is that you and I can be tools of God's salvation. The womb of Mary, the house of Joseph and the manger of the Inn, though simple as they were, could become vehicles for salvation. Hence rejoice and celebrate in the birth of the Saviour.

Rev.G.Devakadasham

“CHRISTMAS DEMONSTRATES GOD’S SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR”

- The Moderator’s Christmas Message

During this month we are celebrating Christmas remembering that our Lord Jesus Christ became poor in order that we can become rich. Yes, it is true that many of us particularly the church leaders and all church workers have become rich, but then have we become white collared people creating distance from the masses of the people of our nation who continue to be poor. In spite of all the socio-economic developments taking place in our country, the number of poor is also increasing in the same ratio. Their conditions are also becoming more and more miserable. In the midst of manifold growth of the church we have also built up a big gap between the church and the poor. In our Indian context a hundred years ago our pastors, catechists, evangelists and Bible women were much closer to the poor villagers and were available to them all the time. These rich structures have been totally demolished and we have established urban structures with more of urban oriented and ordained church workers while more than 60% of our congregations are still in rural

areas and in the villages. In the next one year as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the 2000th birthday of our Lord, shall we prepare our church, so that it can become available to the poor, the needy and the deprived citizens of our country? Shall we take all



possible steps to reduce the gap between the church and the poor?

India - the Decade of the Churches solidarity with the poor

During 4th to 6th March, 1999 about 500 church leaders and theologians are going to meet in Delhi for a 3 day convention organised jointly by the Church of South India,

Church of North India, Marthoma Church, United Lutheran Church, and the Methodist Church with the help of the National Council of Churches in India. Catholic Church Leaders will also join. The main and only objective of this Convention is to think, plan and act during the next 10 years under the banner of “Decade of the Churches’ Solidarity with the poor”. Following this convention in Delhi there will be many regional and local conventions to transform the life style of our church and its ministries to come closer to the poor as much as possible, particularly in our Indian context.

The presbyters of CSI Coimbatore Diocese spent a

whole day on 23rd November 1998 and while taking many decisions in getting closer to the poor, they have also decided to contribute 1% of their income every month for the next one year to begin with for a commonly accepted programme for the poor. It is the first step, many more will follow as we get closer to the 2000th year of the birth of our Lord Jesus.

This is my Christmas

message as Moderator and Leader of the Church of South India to the whole christian community in India with a challenging invitation to commit ourselves in the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ who may bring us down from the transfiguration mountain to make ourselves available with him for the poor, needy and the suffering.

The Eighth Assembly of World Council of Churches

I have just returned from the 8th Assembly of the World Council of Churches which took place at Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe in Africa from 3rd to 14th December, 1998.

There were 4,500 participants representing about

300 churches from more than 100 countries of the world. Among the many regional and global subjects discussed and deliberated "Human Rights" has got the attention of all. Incidentally 10th December is observed as Human Rights Day. Apart from many speeches and write-ups on Human Rights there were a large number of exhibitions and demonstrations focussing on the rights of the children, equality of women, claims of the handicapped, dalits, tribals and so many others who are denied the minimum rights, leave alone the enjoyment of privileges because of and by the oppressive structures of the society.

The saddest part of the events were the stories narrated

by the African leaders of their civil wars and inter-state wars. These unending wars have crippled their economic growth since most of their resources meant for developments are spent on wars. Their greatest burden is their international debts mostly spent on wars.

From the Indian delegations serious appeal was made to World Council of Churches to co-ordinate with the Vatican and the religious leaders of other faiths to create Peace Making Missions (instead of Peace keeping forces of the UNO) in all places where there are conflicts, including Asia and Middle East.

May the Prince of Peace bring this Mission into a reality at the close of the millennium.

Christian Education

The Rayalaseema Diocesan Sunday School Teachers Training Institute was held in Adoni on 30th October and 1st November 1998. 138 Sunday School Teachers were trained in various disciplines of Sunday School ministry. 28 young boys and girls attended the Institute to become Sunday School Teachers in rural congregations. The Superintendents and young pastors were oriented separately in their respective roles for Sunday Schools.

committed to strengthen the Sunday School ministry. The

hosted the Institute with great enthusiasm and commitment. The



Director of Christian Education Department along with the local pastros took sessions in the Institute. The local congregation

Sunday School books under the titlw "Wings of Faith" were found relevant and effective in this Diocesan Sunday Schools. The Sunday School Teachers experienced great enrichment through programme like this for the first time. the Teachers took a solemn oath to create new Sunday Schools under a slogan "One congregation, two

Sunday Schools" by 2000 A.D. Each Teacher received a certificate of credit as Sunday School Teacher.

The Bishop of the Diocese the Rt. Rev. C.B.M. Frederick exhorted the participants to become more

Snippets from the WCC Jubilee Assembly held at Harare, December 1998

WCC has eight new members.

The Assembly's decision raises to 339 the number of the council's full and associate member churches, up from 332. (One of the eight churches admitted to full membership had previously been an associate member church.)

WCC calls for cancellation of debts

The World Council of Churches intends to propose the cancellation of debts owed by the world's poorest nations, but not without holding a

Catholics joining WCC not out of the question, says Fr. Thomas Stransky.

Women, youth want bigger role in WCC

dialogue with borrowers and lenders, the WCC General Secretary said at a press conference.

WCC sets up commission with Orthodox Churches

The Assembly set up a special commission in a bid to resolve the issue of the participation of Orthodox Churches in the Organisation.

However only hours after the

Assembly voted to set up the commission, the Russian Orthodox Church delegation at the Assembly announced that it was suspending its participation in the WCC's Central Committee while the 'special commission on Orthodox participation in the WCC' conducted its deliberations.

Women's ordination, inclusive language in reference to God and discussion of homosexuality by WCC protestant members as well as westernised decision making processes which the Orthodox feel marginalise them within the ecumenical movement.



Rev. G. Dyvasirvadham, General Secretary, CSI with the Most Reverend and Rt. Hon'ble George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury



CONGRATULATIONS!

The South India Churchman congratulates
Rev. G. Dyvasirvadham,
General Secretary,
Church of South India

on his election to the 150 member Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, at its Jubilee Assembly at Harare. This committee will run the WCC for the next 7 years until 2005 when the next Assembly meets.

A Word From your General Secretary

The village Bethlehem, the centre of the earth from where the fountain of life sprang up to give life to all and healing to many today remain in history as a blood-stained place even from Rachel's tomb that divides Jerusalem and Bethlehem (Israel & Palestine). A place of peace is now a scene of violence and blood-shed. Prophet Isaiah depicts several of his visions about the kingdom of peace and justice. One of such visions portrays the picture of babes who will no longer taste death and who will live out their life span. (Is 65:20.) Yet it is from this place that babe Jesus was to flee as a refugee to Egypt.

It is in this context we look at the celebration of Christmas keeping a year's distance to the new century and ushering of a new millennium. While by the time this magazine is in your hands the US has bombed the city of Baghdad. How do we understand the story of the birth of the prince of peace when a so called christian nation does this keeping the christmas event a week ahead?

While the millions of the newly-born babes die because of malnutrition and walk on the roads with the help of crutches like old cronies with pale lifeless and unsmiling faces - bonded

children who seldom smile as it is very costly to them as they support their entire family with their daily wages, millions of dollars are recklessly squandered in wars and destruction. When does the kingdom of *shalom* according to Is. 65:20 become a reality in the lives of these unprivileged heirs of the same kingdom? May we



all pray and await that Christmas where the children of hopeless faces will have a smile at the birth of Jesus?

With lots of excitement I share my joy about my participation along with the Moderator and other members of the CSI in the World Council of Churches which met from December 3-13, at Harare. (A person who never sleeps!) in Zimbabwe (A house of stones!). This World Council was the jubilee event in the life of ecumenism. This ecumenical journey which started at Amsterdam in September 1948,

just a year after the birth of CSI, continues the journey through Evanston, New Delhi, Uppsala, Nairobi, Vancouver, Canberra, has a truning in her life at Zimbabwe with the theme 'Turn to God - Rejoice in Hope'. And this journey continues like an unceasing stream of life having Jesus in the centre. The 50th anniversary WCC Assembly

was addressed by two presidents of the Southern part of Africa General Mugabe of Zimbabwe and the charismatic president Nelson Mandela of South Africa who continues to remember the Indian *biryani* packets which were given by the Indian Muslim friends on holidays in his prison. This was

mentioned by him in his speech at the jubilee. India decorated him with *Bharat Ratna* some years ago. In his speech he eulogised WCC as the champion of the oppressed and the exploited.

The drum beat of Zimbabwe welcomed many great leaders like archbishop the Most reverend Right Hon'ble George Carey who preached. Let's hope the WCC breaks new grounds to set new direction for the children of tomorrow who look with hope for a small smile on their tiny faces.

Rev. G. Dyvasirudam

Tamil Regional Seminar on Mission & Evangelism

The Tamil Nadu Regional Seminar on Mission & Evangelism was held from 20th to 21st of November 1998 at the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Arasaradi, Madurai. The theme of this seminar was "The Renewed Communities in Mission". Over 70 participants from all the Tamil speaking dioceses participated. This seminar was co-sponsored by the Department of Mission and

Evangelism of the CSI and the Mission Institute, TTS. The Rt.Rev.D.Thavaraj David Eames, Bishop of the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese inaugurated this seminar. Rev.Dr.Dyaanchand Carr, the Principal of TTS delivered the key note address and presented a paper on the theme.

The other resource persons were Rev.A.Rajamani, Rev.Dr.Lalsangkima Pachau, UTC, Rt.Rev.Dr.D.Pothirajulu and Mr.Vinod Victor. The group discussions took place on the theme and the suggestions were made for further follow-up work. It was a challenging time when R. G. Dyvasirvadam, the General

Secretary of the CSI Synod delivered the valedictory address by challenging the participants to face the third millennium with hope. It is to be noted here that the highlight of this seminar was on the necessity of various training models, case studies and strategies in Mission to be adopted at the congregational level.



Challenging Programmes at Vellore Diocese

A Seminar on Mission at the congregational level was held at "Pravaham" a Retreat Centre at Vellore on 3rd & 4th October 1998. This programme was co-sponsored by the Evangelistic Unit of the Central Church, Vellore and the Department of Mission & Evangelism of CSI Synod. The theme of the seminar was 'Equipping the Local Congregations for Mission'. Mr.Vinod Victor, the Secretary of the Youth Department of the CSI emphasized the role of the Youth in Mission.

A training programme for Evangelists, and Catechists was

held from 6th to 8th of November 1998 at the Arcot Theological Seminary, Vellore. About 70 Catechists and Church workers participated in this training programme.

"Education in Mission" "Culture and Gospel" and communication skills were the main areas in this particular training programme. The participants were equipped and encouraged to proclaim the gospel as well as participate in society with new vision.

A two days seminar was held at 'Snehadeepam' at Vellore on 25th and 26th November 1998. The theme of the seminar was 'A holistic understanding of Mission'. This seminar was co-sponsored by the Department of Mission & Evangelism and the evangelistic unit of the Central Church, Vellore. About 65 participants including pastors, evangelists and catechists and different professional groups from the local congregations attended this Seminar. Dr.Joyce Ponniah, Director of Christian Medical College, Vellore, Rev.Dr.George Isaac, Chaplain of Christian Medical College and Hospital, Vellore and Rev.Dr.W.S.Milton Jeganathan were the resource persons for this seminar. Papers were presented on the theme and group discussions and panel presentations took place. Among various suggestions it was highlighted and discussed in detail regarding the necessity

in the present socio-political and religious context.

Medico-Pastoral concern on AIDS Seminar at Rayalaseema Diocese

A seminar on Medico and Pastoral Concern on AIDS was held on 17th and 18th November 1998 at the CSI Campbell Hospital in Jammalamadgo of the Rayalaseema Diocese. About 50 participants including

pastors, church workers, medical personnel and NGOs. The Rt.Rev.C.B.M.Frederick, Bishop of the Rayalaseema delivered the key note address. The local Revenue Development Officer and local Government representative also

participated in this seminar. Dr.Helen Davidson, the Medical Superintendent of the CSI Campbell Hospital. Dr.Sathiamurthy, Dr.Shoba Yohan of CMAI and



Rev.Dr.W.S Milton Jeganathan were the resource persons. The participants were challenged in this special ministry by utilising the available resources from the church and local Government. A few specific projects have been suggested and to be

implemented in the local context with the help of local NGOs.

One Day Seminar at Nagercoil.

A one day programme for pastors of the Kanyakumari Diocese was held on 3rd November 1998 at the Diocesan Office Campus, Nagercoil. About 120 pastors attended this conference. Prof.Spurgeon and Rev.Dr.W.S.Milton Jeganathan were the resource persons. Papers were presented on the 'Biblical basis of Mission' "New Models and Strategies in Evangelistic Work" and "Pluralism and the future of Mission". Among other practical suggestions it was suggested to have dialogue

centres in all the dioceses to have a more meaningful and effective ministry in the multi-faith context.

The kingdom of God is not realm but reign, not domain but dominion. -(W.N.Clarke)

PRINCIPAL - CNI/CSI ANGLO-INDIAN

Applications are invited from Male Post-Graduate Trained (CNI/CSI) Anglo Indians preferably 40-50 years with 15 + yrs. Teaching and Administrative Experience in Anglo-Indian Schools for the Post of Principal. Also from CNI/CSI Lady Anglo-Indian TTC and Trained Graduate (35 - 45 yrs) with 10 + yrs. Teaching and Administrative Experience in A.I. Junior Schools/Section. For the Post of Headmistress. Applications with Details and Names of Two references must reach:

The Chairman

Society of The Bishop's School

5A, Gen. Bhagat Marg

Pune 1

Latest by 31st December 1998.

PASTOR'S PAGE

The pastors are the recognized agents of God's Ministry through His church. Equipping them in the best possible way is the task of the Pastoral Aid Department. The Director on the advice of the Synod Ministerial Committee is pleased to present the programmes for 1999:

- Young Pastors Meet
- Seminar for Ordained Women of the CSI
- - Inter-diocesan Pastors' Summer Family Conference
- Regional Pastors' Conference
- Pastors Study and Reflection Programme
- Pastors Exposure Programme (National and International)
- Holy Land Study Programme
- Pastors' Counselling Programme
- Proficiency Improvement Programme for Pastors
- Skill Development Programmes for Pastors

More programmes will be added

according to the needs from time to time.

The Department also publishes Bible Study materials and other devotional aids for the pastors. We look for your feedback on



these programmes.

EXPERIENCES FROM THE FIELD

The Director spent a day with the Bishop of Trichy-Tanjore Diocese, Bishop James Srinivasan and the clergy there on 18th November 1998 at the Bishop Heber College Chapel. The Director of Communications, Rev.C.V.Theodore and the Secretary of the Youth Department, Mr.Vinod Victor also participated in the Pastors' meeting. The vision and the burdens of the synod departments were shared with the pastors, who showed keen interest in the synod programmes. The pastors agreed to meet for a day of study and sharing every month under the supervision of the bishop. It

is a positive response to the PAD programmes.

On 4th December 1998, the director along with the secretary, Youth Department, Mr. Vinod Victor visited the South Kerala Diocese. The Director shared the visions of the Department on the topic 'Minister for the Millennium'. Bishop J.W.Gladstone arranged for the meeting and in his absence Rev.Ben Gladstone, Vice-Chairman conducted the meeting.

I look forward to visiting all the dioceses of our Church in 1999.

Rev.G.Devakadasham, Director.

Multi-faith Sunday School Secretaries Conference at Kovalam beach, December 4-6,1998

The committed teachers of Kanyakumari and South Kerala dioceses' Sunday Schools go into a village where there is no christian congregation, start a Sunday School for children, teach them the Bible along with other educational values, and influence the parents in their faith formation.

Sixty such Sunday School Secretaries from these two Dioceses met in a three days conference at kovalam Beach in South Kerala, organised by the Christian Education Department of the Synod. Following were the issues discussed.

- Importance of children's ministry as a feature of new Millennium.
- Significance of Christian Education in multi-faith context.
- How to present the "Word of God" to the children of other faiths.
- Biblical perspectives of mission through Sunday Schools.
- Importance of Prayer in multi-faith context .
- Jesus' methods of teaching.

-Rev.Winslow, South Kerala Diocese



NARRATING THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS IN OUR MODERN AGE : AN ESSAY ON CONTEXT AND METHOD: THEMES

*The Rev. Dr. D. Sathianathan Clarke**

"This tyrannize over us, too, money, clothes, houses, furniture, food, automobiles - all the material paraphernalia of existence - captivate our interest and dominate our thoughts. 'To have' concerns us a great deal more than 'to be'. Few of us have attained the freedom from things". (Albert Edward Day, Discipline and Discovery, Nashville : 1977)

Christmas is an exhausting time of the year. Most of us are tired by the time the actual day of Christmas arrives. Part of this fatigue is, I think, psychological. A long 365 day year comes lingeringly to a close. And December 25 brings with it the knowledge that we have exactly a week more for the completion of the year. Like the tiredness that envelopes a working adult on a Friday evening, Christmas brings on the weightiness of a year coming to its termination. An awareness that one week lies ahead to unwind before the beginning of a new year of activity. However, much of our weariness also comes from the buzz of activity that precedes this festival. We are occupied mainly with many things before the day of Christmas. In most of our families there is a frenzy about things to be bought (clothes, gifts, Christmas tree), things to be cooked (special

sweets and savories, Christmas cake, festive lunches) and things to be done (greeting cards, Church offering, Christmas charities, and house cleaning). Often we use the word gifts rather than things. I think this makes us all feel as though we are absorbed with something a bit more noble. But actually we are preoccupied with things. We are so exhausted because of all this preoccupation with things that there is very little time for any thing else. A season that ought to be the most reflective one becomes the most tedious. Apart from the Christmas Eucharist, which also consumes much time, money and energy of the faithful parishioners absorbed in decorative things, there is little space to ponder on what all of this means to us as christians and what the gift of this Christ-child means to the world.

The problem with this is not just that we are too busy to pause in order to remember and contemplate the story of the gift of the Christ-child. There is a more serious religious predicament. Because christians parrot the story of the Christ-child without conscious collective reflection the story gradually gets told according to the mega-narrative of the world. The megalomaniac of the world is that life is an endless process

of being engrossed in the world of things: one's enjoyment, anguish, objective, and satisfaction comes from its pursuit, consumption, accumulation and donation. In my own life I am constantly reminded of my *thing-mindedness* when I sit down in the morning to reflect for a while in silent devotion before God. A whole complex of things inundate my mind: the rattle in my car, the lack of a certain book for preparation for a lecture, the shirt that needs ironing, the food that needs to be cooked and the computer that could be updated. In a world that is increasingly caught up with the forces of commodification and consumerism in a market-based global economic system even the narrative of Christmas is transformed into a trivial saga of things. Accordingly, the test of a successful Christmas season for many of us lies in whether we have discerningly bought things, promptly made things, hospitably distributed things, and dutifully decorated things.

It is important to salvage our collective religious reflective nature and re-collect and remember the Christmas story. Paul Ricoeur makes a case for just this when he summons communities to continuously recover and re-imagine "the

* He teaches theology at the United Theological College, Bangalore

narrative identity". For him, this involves an interplay between "sedimented models of dominant popular myths under which our forebears lived and our imaginative re-interpretations of their textual or oral *givens*. "Narrative identity" saves human beings from meaninglessness and aimlessness: it is constituted in weaving our own story against the backdrop of traditional forms; and it also constitutes our identity in a self-aware and self-reflective manner. It is important for us to revisit the narrative of the Christ-child with this in mind. For in doing so we are recovering a narrative identity that we constitute but also by which we will be constituted as Christians.

In this context of being preoccupied with things during the season of Christmas I wish to reflect on two responses to the birth of the Christ-child in the Gospel of Luke. In the second chapter the writer of the Gospel of Luke starts by describing in detail the reaction of the shepherds and, then almost in passing, the text comments on the response of Mary the mother of Jesus. Interestingly both of these figures are also tied up with things. But the things they are involved with are different in nature. After listening to the operative rendition of the gospel news performed by the angels, the shepherds say "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see *the thing* that has happened, which

the Lord has made known to us". (Lk. 2:15) Mary also is preoccupied with *things* of a different kind from that which keeps us busy. We read that "Mary kept all these *things*, pondering them in her heart". (Lk.2:19) The *thing* here is a complex of events that is taking place among them. One in which they discern the working of God. A working of God that is different and radical. This is perhaps the first point that must be reclaimed in the narrative of Christmas: the things about which we are called to be caught up with are everyday events that function as signs of God's presence and activity in the world. As a community and as individuals we must resist being engrossed in our busy mind-set

NIIPGTS, SERAMPORE COLLEGE M.Th. COURSES

For the Academic Year 1999-2000

NIIPGTS, a Federated Faculty Organisation for Higher Theological Education, of Serampore College, Serampore and Bishop's College, Calcutta is offering Master of Theology Courses from the academic year beginning from June 1999-2000 in the following Branches of Studies:

1. Christian Theology
2. Missiology
3. New Testament
4. New Testament (with specialisation in Translation and Linguistics)
5. Religions

The last date of receiving application, duly filled in, is 28th February, 1999. Eligibility for admission is as prescribed by the Senate of Serampore College. In each Branch of Studies seats are reserved for women candidates. The cost of application form is Rs.100/=

For application form and other details, contact:

**Dr.Siga Arles,
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in the world of things; for in so doing we fail to recognise the various images of the incarnate Christ that continually encounter us.

How do we become open to the series of God-activated events that mirror the incarnation of the Christ-child in the world around us? Again I wish to use the examples of the shepherds and Mary in Luke's account. I suggest that together they represent the dual dimensions of appropriating the narrative of the Christ-child for us today. The shepherd symbolize the activism of those that have heard and seen the news of the Christ-child but intend to encounter it in its materiality. In this version the shepherds are granted a dreamlike and, almost fantastic (implying fantasy) mystical vision: an enchanting and enthralling sound and light extravaganza. Personally I am too much of a realist to be captivated by all of this magical mystery performance from the theatre of heavenly space. Rather I am struck by the need of the simple and sparse community of shepherds not to be satisfied with this mystical spectacle. They are not content with hearing the explosive news through the spectacular performance of the angels. Instead the shepherds want to be concretely engaged with the mundane and material aspects of this God-activated radical event. Thus they travel to Bethlehem to "see the thing that has happened, which the Lord has

made known" to them through the angels. They may have taken gifts to the Christ-child. But the thing that absorbed them was the wish and the will to witness the event of the birth of the Christ-child. The shepherds move away from the spectacular and miraculous and toward the concrete and commonplace: the site of divine manifestation is not the heavenly stage but the earthly stable. The child is to be found among the poor, the refugee, the homeless: "wrapped in swathing bands and lying in a manger". And the shepherds set off toward Bethlehem. And in this turning away from the mystical heavenly vision lies their own encounter with the Christ-child. They witness for themselves "the thing" that has taken place. And they glorify and praise God. And they proclaim that which they saw and heard concerning the child. The shepherds symbolize an important truth of the narrative of Christmas: Christian activism means not being content with the mystical visions of the theatre of heaven; rather it means accepting the reality that heaven is poured out into the actuality of the ordinary and seeking for the incarnate present there.

Even though Mary can be seen as sharing in the desire of the shepherds to be entangled in the new and radical thing that God is doing in the birth of the Christ child, she is presented in the text in contrast to the shepherds. "But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in

her heart". I take the "but" in this sentence to mean either rather or instead. That is while the shepherds were activity-bound in seeking to be engrossed with the thing that God had done among them, Mary instead chose to ruminate upon all of these things in her heart.

Mary symbolizes the reflective contemplation of encountering the divine mystery even as it manifests itself in the course of events in the concrete everyday world around her. In the midst of feverish activity and unexpected visitations Mary is deliberate in internalizing all the happenings of God in the world. She merely allows herself to be awe-struck by what God is doing in, through and around her. She opens herself to the event and allows it to invade her heart, mind and soul. It again is stored in embryonic ferment. Two qualifications must be built into Mary's portrayal in Luke's account. On the one hand, Mary's model of reflective contemplation concerning the God inspired and God-manifesting events of the gift of the Christ-child was not abstract and remote. Mary was the one who was most physically, emotionally and mentally linked up with the birth of Jesus. She knew what his birth meant in the most intimate and psycho-physical manner; and yet she needed to treasure all these things in her heart to understand its God-willed purpose in the world. On the other hand, this ruminating and reflective

posutre of external events does not preclude further involvement with the mission of God through the Christ-child. Mary thus is able to continually follow Jesus throughout his ministry. The reflective posture of deliberate contemplation does not become an excuse for abstruse seclusion or detached comfort. Rather it symbolizes a necessary aspect in discerningly appropriating the gift of the Christ-child.

I suggest that we need not choose between these models in recovering the meaning of the gift of the Christ-child. In order to escape the thing-mindedness of our age we might do well to integrate the activism of the shepherds and the reflectivity of Mary as we seek to be engrossed in the God-inspired and God-revealing events of our time. We are continually involved in the praxis of incarnation. And because of this we are able to testify to the reality of the gift of the Christ-child, the incarnational prototype. *Praxis, as it were, points to the two-foldness of action and reflection which cannot be extricated from each other.* The Shepherds' depict the face of praxis in which activism is stressed but this does not rule out the possibility that reflection follows. Indeed the shepherds must have collectively reflected on all that was taking place before they start proclaiming what had happened to them in their wanderings to the manger. Mary exemplifies the face of

praxis which emphasizes reflectivity. However, she is most active when it comes to being involved in the mission of God in the Christ-child. The reflective phase strengthens her for consistent and connected involvement in the mission of Jesus till his end. In fact, while all those who were activists in Jesus ministry turn their backs on him during his trial and death, Mary is seen to be faithful till the end in her practice of following Jesus on his journey to the cross.

From all that I have said it is now clear that we need a stereoscopic vision to appropriate the meaning of Christmas (the gift of the incarnation of the Christ-child) to recover and reconstruct our narrative identity today. First, we must continuously apprehend the events around us through which the incarnated One encounters us through the world around us. For this, the stereo-scopic vision consists of a well trained outward-looking eye that discerns and celebrates signs and wonders of Christ's presence working around us and a charitable inward-looking eye that expectantly nurtures such signs so as to be prepared for enjoying one's own actions, thoughts, and words to the furtherance of activity of the incarnate one. The former we might label shepherd's eye view and the latter we might call a Maresque vision. To strive to catch a glimpse of Christ in people and events around us without self-inclusion and self-analysis leads to hypocrisy. At

the same time, to work only toward interiorizing these signs with a view to be perfected in one's own ecstatic disposition leads to self-indulgence. To celebrate Christmas according to this perspective means being postured away from the mystical, enchanting, glorious, and operatic arena of the cultus. Or the heavenly theatre of the community liturgy becomes the starting point of the being thrown outward toward the struggling groups of human beings in sites of vulnerability: the territory of the poor, the refugee, the homeless. It also means being willing to take time to be reflective of the events that surround us in the knowledge that God is at work in them and needs us to draw them within our hearts in order to prepare and fortify ourselves to join in the enfolding drama of God's continued mission in the world. James Finley expresses this aptly when he says, "Christ did not merely inhabit human flesh; he became flesh. He made himself, as God, to be one with humanity in the concrete, historical realities of human life. Truly, God has entered into the world and it is in the world that Christians must turn to find God".*

Second we also need to correlate these present events of the appearing incarnate one with the original story of the birth of the Christ-child as recorded in the gospels. For this, the stereo-scopic vision consists of an acutely sensitive short-sighted vision to detect

traces of the perpetual reaching out of God through contemporaneous and concrete events and an imaginative, though reliable, far-sighted vision to enable us to identify the general gestalt of such Christ-events as portrayed in the Gospel accounts. This gestalt of the Christ-child's appearance corresponds across time. Thus, the prototype of the original incarnation confirms the legitimacy of all other manifestations of God with us. Three features of this Christ gestalt from the birth narratives in the Lukan account may be proposed: (1) It appears among the lowly, poor, displaced and homeless rather than the noble, rich, secure and arrogant. (2) It brings together for the sake of love various classes and types of people in a stance of intimacy. (3) It has the unique gift of drawing people into the realization that God is acting for a greater purpose through the events that involve the incarnated One. I am suggesting that even though we might start by relating the Christmas narrative through our experience of contemporary God-manifesting events in the world around us, the norms and lenses through which we determine whether or not this is a spawning of the Christ-incarnation is worked out from our recalling of the original story as communicated through the Gospels.

The point of this reflection is quite simple. Let me summarize its general propositions.

Sometime our preoccupation with physical things is merely a substitute for the experience of the blessed events of God's manifestation among us. But sometimes our unreflective recitation of the story of the Christ-child is merely another fabricated version of the megallo-narrative of the consumer-driven world. In both cases Christmas is transformed into a revelry of things; and this is what the world witnesses.

There is an acute need to recover and reconstruct the narrative of the Christ-child. There is no doubt that the incarnation of the Christ-child, which is almost 2000 years, is a prototype. In being so, it grounds our belief in God's availability in the heart of human existence. However, this manifestation of the human face of God proliferates in an unimaginable manner ever since it was manifest so decisively in Jesus Christ. Christians are invited to posture themselves in proximity to these God-activated and God revealing events of the world outside the confines of their comfort zones. This requires a stereo-scopic vision. The **first** stereo-scopic eye is discerningly outward-looking (shepherd's eye view) and nurturally inward-looking (Maresque vision) as it seeks to integrate the praxis of activism and praxis of reflectivity in apprehending the multiple manifestations of the Christ-child among us. The **second** stereo-scopic eye is shrewd and sensitive in its short-sight

envisionment and imaginative of this stereo-scopic vision the narrative identity of Christmas is recovered and celebrated.

For those of us who are exhausted by all the activity and work of Christmas that is centred around things there may be some good news. But like the good news of the Gospels it does involve risk. We are given the opportunity today to cease from all of that preoccupation with things and be open to the series of God-inspired and God-manifesting events that takes place around us because of the birth of the Christ-child: open to encounter, open to ponder, open to join in the dynamic of the Christ-child. To encounter the ever-approaching incarnate One who appears with the vulnerable, for the sake of intimacy of all humanity in love, and for the purpose of drawing human beings into the purposes of God. To ponder the fact that at Christmas God came down to be closer to us than we can ever imagine. To join in the events by which we are made aware that more than anything God wants us to be in an intimate reconciled relationship with God and each other.

This Word, this Logos, which Greeks and Hebrews unite in recognising as the controlling power of the whole universe, is no longer unknown or dimly apprehended. The Light which in some measure lightens every man has shone in its full splendour.

-- (William Temple)

CHRISTMAS, THEN AND NOW

- *Susikaran Thangasami*

Even now I remember being taken by my parents for Christmas shopping probably in 1941 by tram and returning with a blue and maroon check half-pant and so forth. Another instance I remember about Christmas is that I got a hard knock on my head by Catechist Theophilus when as a small boy I lighted a sparkler in the church at Nazareth during the service. Since then for many years Christmas has been mostly a time of shopping and feasting, the most symbolic for me being dosai with mutton curry and the plum cake.

The church part has been a little bizarre, for one has to go very early to get a seat inside the church and so we end up not sleeping at all on the 24th night resulting in being dull and drowsy throughout the 25th!

Of late, my perspectives and preferences have changed. The externals and the rituals have faded and Christmas time becomes a time of reflection. I wear the same dress that I wear throughout the year and go to the church service unrushed and unruffled in the morning only, and eat the same routine food. The celebration is in the meaning and significance of Christmas, a richer celebration I would say! It is said that pivotal changes have taken place in human history due to six Jews. To begin with Moses who gave a unifying and ethically feasible and revolutionary code that has stayed on. Then, after Jesus came Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx.

Without doubt Jesus has meant the most for human understanding of the nature of our life. As Christmas nears I think about Jesus with excitement and concentration, with bated breath, sweaty palms and an accelerated heart as it were!

Millions and millions of people live and die, yet one life, the life of Jesus, keeps haunting us and challenging us; yes, there is something in it! Inevitably we like him and we want to be like him - he seems to be the model of an ideal human being in all fullness and finality. Something that was in Jesus is in each one of us too and hence the attraction to him. It is a share of divinity that is in us even in common with Jesus. If God was in Jesus fully and without further space, God is in us also in some measure. That precisely is our premise and hope. If Jesus were God, it is in this sense. He is God - a man in whom God was manifest fully. And therefore we too could live the way he lived and do the things he did. Because a man in God could be like Jesus, we derive hope for ourselves.

That God can do miracles does not really excite us - it is routinely happening all around - I stick a rose twig in a pot, the twig sprouts and soon rose flowers are produced by an insignificant-looking twig and out of mud! I bury a coconut fruit and wait - and get a magnificent tree high and heavy and yet balancing itself against wind and weight. Are these not wonders? Yes, we are surrounded by wonders but because we lack the wonder we feel bored sometimes!

Jesus though a man could do miracles and could forgive his diabolical enemies. This realisation raises in us the hope that we could also become like him if we submit ourselves to God and allow Him to mould us. This is what Immanuel God with us, means to us today.

Please think about this. If Jesus were God Himself then the miracles he performed are not miracles. God can be anything and can do

anything. He can do the impossible. It is a foregone conclusion. But if Jesus the man could live the way he lived, we who are his brothers and sisters can also live in the same way. And it alone evokes that hope in us. We now recognise who we are and what we can do - Christmas reveals to us our own nature and capability. Christmas is thus fundamentally a revelatory event.

In another way Jesus' life has transformed human concept of God significantly. From time immemorial man has been in the habit of offering animal and human sacrifices to God. This has been a response to the fear of the unknown. It is known that human beings and animals used to be placed in weird baskets and burnt alive in order to appease God! After the death of Jesus on the cross, the Gospel writers, St. Paul and the writer to the Hebrews showed Jesus' death as the final and sufficient sacrifice and thus scorched and exterminated the practice of animal and human sacrifices. Thus his followers came out of one of humanity's most crude and barbaric religious practices.

Every Christmas comes as a milestone in one's life time. Are we utilizing the season to understand Jesus better? We treat all spiritual leaders alike - persecute and murder them first and then 'worship' them! They are difficult to understand and more difficult to follow and therefore we "worship" them which is merely a hypocritical adoration. May we for a change, this Christmas time, think about Jesus more deeply and determine to follow him more closely.

The church is the family of God. It is seen in miniature in every family. -

Ferguson

GOING GLOBAL - A DISCUSSION AT THE WCC

Globalization is fast becoming one of the popular "buzz words" of our day.

But what does it mean? What are its implications for us and for our churches?

Interviews with assembly participants revealed a wide range of definitions. Some point to globalizaion's potential to lift up, others to its capacity to oppress.

One thing is sure: globalization has implications for all of us, for our dignity, for evangelism and even for how a congregation calls a new minister or pays its electricity bill.

There are a number of interpretations, began Phambili ka Ntloko of the Church of God and Saints in Christ, South Africa, whose ministry is with industrial workers. "Globalization

is a strategy of international capital to create more markets for itself and to restructure the relationships of production.

"All companies are being pushed to be internationally competitive, so they downsize, laying off workders," he said.

The church must respond holistically, Mr. Ntloki said. "We must be the voice that says an alternative society is possible, where there will be justice, equality, sharing and dignity. And we must minister to workers and understand their need and problems.

"People, when they lose their job, sense that their dignity as human beings is challenged," he said. "Some go to the extent of hiding the fact that they are no longer working. They go out carrying their bag as usual and come back in the evening, because not working hurts their dignity.

"The church must restor that dignity. The church must be an

anchor of hope in their hour of darkness".

The Rev.Dr.Kathryn T.Williams, of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the USA, said "that there's no such thing as a United States economy. It's a global economy..When Black Monday hit Wall Street, it also hit Japan and London."

Similarly, she tells her co-



parishioners at First Christian church in Corpus Christi, Texas, "There's no longer home or foreign, there's one world, we are the stewards and we are responsible for the whole world and not just the people of Corpus Christi. You can't make dicisions for this congregation except in the context of the whole inhabited world of God."

More recently, she discovered that four or five months into the year, the congregaion had not yet sent money to the denominations' basic mission finance.."I was horrirfied," she recalled. "I went to the chair of the stewardship committee and said, If this continues I am going to divide my tithe and send my portion of the money directly."

The chairperson responded, "but the light bills have to be paid."Dr.Williams retorted,"At my house we tithe first and then we figure out how to pay the light bill."

Until the problem was resolved

another four or five months later, Dr.Williams wrote a cheque to the denomination's mission body and put it in the offering plate each week "with strict insturctions to send it immediately."

"Thinking globally" also affects the way we call the minsiter," Dr.Williams said. "Ask the candidates, Do you believe in the mission of the whole church?"

Some people say, We have so much to do here.' But Jesus said, Go into all the world Jerusalem Samaria, to the ends of the earth.' You have to do them all at the same time.

"Every decision must be made in the context of the whole church and the whole world," she said.

Assembly participants who were interviewed agreed that globalization was there to stay, and that the church

"must fight against the bad side of globalization," said Bishop Hans Verny, of the Old Catholic Church in Switzerland. "We should not be too adapted to society."

"We can look at it and see how big financial powers can help the weaker ones," said the Rev.Oka Fau'olo of the congregational christian chruch in Samoa. "They want to make money (that's all right) as long as they don't take too much and as long as we have good mutual understanding and negotiation."

Globalization also has good sides, several people said. "Would the WCC have met in Harare in 1948? Bishop Gerny asked. "People can have more contact, can help in areas where they could not help before. Christ says, 'Go and make disciples of all nations.'

It's a challenge to bring all nations the gospel of liberation. We can use new tools like the Internet to share the Gospel in word and deed, using the new tools that link us globally."

A STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION OF MINORITIES IN INDIA TODAY

The Church of South India express anguish and concern over the present socio-cultural and political happenings in the country and simultaneously express their solidarity with the victims of the baseless violence and their commitment to affirming the plurality and construction of secular fabric of the country.

The CSI believes its three million members and several more Christians from related churches are an integral part of the country. In this our fifty first year as a church, we remember with gratitude the services of our forebears who have toiled and contributed to the life and well being of the people of the country, particularly the poor and the socio-culturally weaker sections. Not only in the fields of education, health and technical training but in the freedom struggle, members of the church have been in the forefront and even laid down their life for the country. Members of the church, who have laboured along with the Mahatma have been rewarded by his recognition of the same. The Church is proud of its members who are currently serving the country in positions of influence be it in the armed forces, government or political

parties. With humility, we as a church, acknowledge our Divine calling to be the 'Salt and Light' in the world. The church hereby pledges its continued commitment and involvement in the society, serving the poor and the marginalised, thereby upholding the fundamental principles of the constitution of the country.

The church is appalled by the current state of affairs in the country and particularly the dastardly acts of aggression and violence in Gujarat against minorities, in this case Christians. Given the fact that majority of the victims are adivasis and women, the CSI joins hands with other churches on the grounds of religious persecution but also joins hands with secular and autonomous adivasi and women's organisation in the country condemning the violation of human rights meted out against indigenous people and women. The church believes that the State has overstepped its role and has wittingly or unwittingly taken sides with the perpetrators of violence against individuals and the citizens who have exercised their constitutional right to embrace a specific faith. The church further condemns all forms of fundamentalist

approaches and programmes, be it in the government or religious bodies, which grossly violate the basic precepts and principles of the constitution of the country. The church calls upon the government, the Prime Minister and all in authority to re-examine the current situation in Gujarat, border of Karnataka and Maharashtra and Tamilnadu and ensure on an IMMEDIATE BASIS safety of life to all Christians and other religious minorities who feel threatened. Secondly the State should intellectually and emotionally steer clear of the fundamentalist forces, be they political or socio-cultural.

The world wide church joins hands with the CSI in offering its support to the nation in its attempt to build a pluralistic society which affirms participation of the majority in all spheres of life, tolerance and creates the space for a multi cultural and religious community to live and contribute to each others growth and therefore the country's growth in a meaningful manner.

Sd/-

The Members of the Synod
Church of South India.

Top : The Moderator, CSI, the Most Rev. William Moses seen with the Most Rev. and Right Hon'ble George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth.

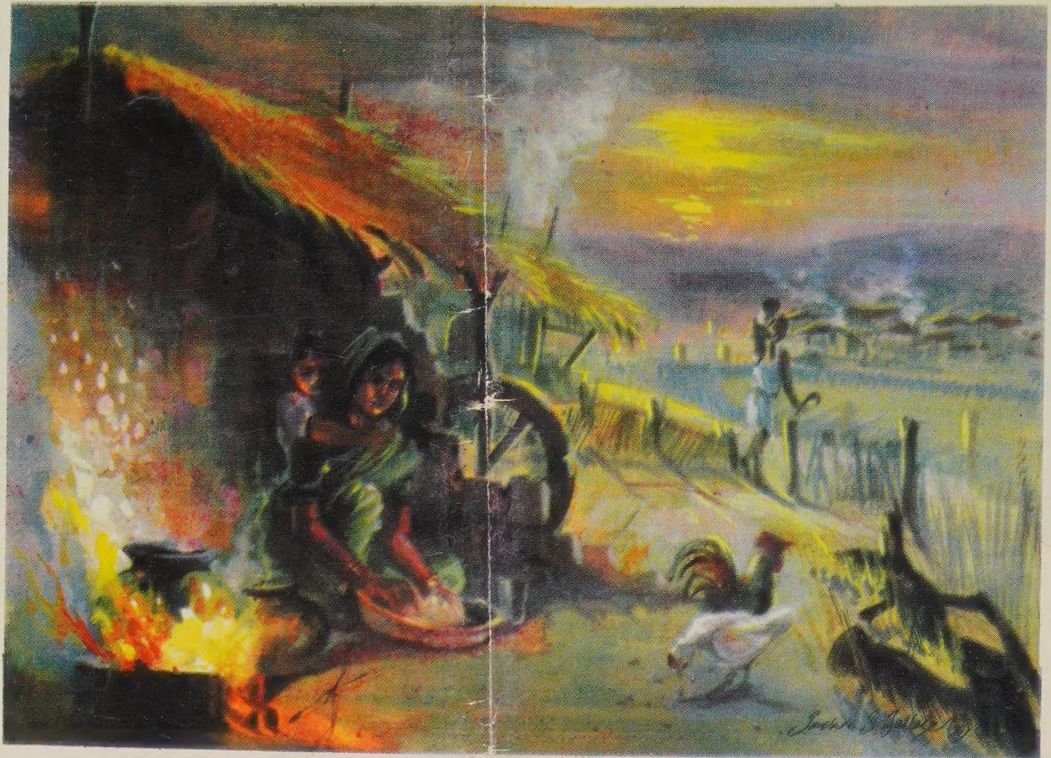
Bottom left : Some of the delegates to Lambeth 1998 seen with the Moderator.



The Moderator, CSI, the Most Rev. William Moses seen with the Most Rev. and Right Hon'ble George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth.



Some of the delegates to Lambeth 1998 seen with the Moderator.



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